

POST-INDUSTRIAL CONVERGENCE IN TIME ALLOCATION

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Developed societies, it is argued, are in a number of respects, and for very clear reasons, becoming more similar to each other in their patterns of daily life. This article shows, using time budget evidence, a rather striking multinational convergence in the broad balance between leisure and work. But first it introduces a model of development, one specifically connected with the historical evolution of time use, a model that takes labour (and consumption) time as its central variables, but which owes more to Thorstein Veblen than to Karl Marx.

Veblen argues that, in pre- and early industrial societies, class divisions of society, though based on material possessions and inherited positions, are expressed most fundamentally in time: he suggests that access to free time is the primary means of social differentiation. Those with possessions and positions use these to annex leisure. They constitute a leisure class which relies for its extensive consumption on the labour of a 'working class' which by definition has scarce leisure, and has much lower levels of consumption.

The class division is accentuated by the nature of the consumption activities of the leisure class, which itself serves to demonstrate the subordinate position of the labour class. There is a double derogation. It is not just that the 'lower orders' have lower levels of consumption, but also that they are regularly found in positions of direct subordination to the higher. Members of the labour class are often engaged as suppliers to the leisure class, providing services that they themselves can never expect to enjoy, on a face-to-face basis, for low pay which reflects the plentiful supply of the skills they deploy, in circumstances of menial insecurity and directly dependent on the personal patronage of individuals from the super-ordinate class. The characteristic social relation in a pre-industrial society is that between a master and a servant; it finds its most concrete expression in differences in patterns of time allocation.

The degree of division will necessarily vary between societies. In part, this intersocietal variation will reflect the size of the surplus above the level of subsis-

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tence. Let us say that the surplus is the amount of unallocated time left in the society once its members' subsistence needs have been satisfied. If there is no surplus, then obviously there can be no leisure class. The surplus in turn reflects the natural productive endowments of the physical environment, and also the *organization* and *technology* employed to satisfy the wants of the members of the society.

Different forms of *social organization* have impact both on the size of the surplus and on its distribution. Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class*¹ concentrated to a large degree on the European feudal model of development, in which the development of military organization enables a rather extreme division of the surplus, and allows its reproduction and intensification through conquest and oppression. The accumulated surplus is exchanged for stores of weapons, and for contracts of military fealty, and these in turn permit further accumulation. The possession of this accumulated surplus, as well as its origin as spoil gained through warfare, is (Veblen tells us) symbolized in the engagement of the males of the upper class in games and pastimes that mimic military prowess (and also by the idleness of the women of this class which, in Veblen's extended and very serious joke, may be taken as symbolizing their status as booty from successful raids).

This pattern may continue into succeeding stages of development. The feudal division between the aristocratic leisure class and the common labouring class, reproducing itself through inherited real property and inherited arsenals and associated personal fealties, and expressed as conspicuous (if strenuous) idleness, can to some degree be matched or imitated by merchants who use accumulated financial capital, or by (the children of) the factory masters of the early industrial revolution using material capital.

All that is necessary for Veblen's argument, is that leisure is a principal means of social differentiation. Nothing in this line of argument assumes any essential function for leisure. I would not wish to deny the inherent desirability of leisure (though Veblen comes close to doing so). But irrespective of any *inherent* desirability, he asserts merely that it is made honourable by association with the class that is able to idle.

There are of course alternatives to Veblen's sort of pre-industrial division between the labour and the leisure class. There is in fact a wide range of possible methods through which the society might allocate or distribute its surplus. At one extreme the surplus can just be left to rot (as the unpicked fruits in the territory of a group of hunter-gatherers will simply wither on the bough); the European feudal model is the opposite extreme in which the surplus is efficiently transformed into social structure through a hierarchical structure of fealties (via the exchange of military services for intermediate positions in the hierarchy). One alternative to the feudal solution is the potlatch, in which redistribution and stability of social structure is maintained by 'blowing' the entire surplus in occasional cathartic and egalitarian consumption. Here what is honorific is not leisure itself, but the individual's responsibility for allowing others to enjoy it; rather than aiming for personal leisure, people in such cultures work to be members of the party-throwing class.

Another example not envisaged in Veblen's account, which serves to avoid the accumulation of a surplus (and the social instability that results from it), is the temporally structured dissipation of the surplus. The ancient Jewish leisure practices, the sabbath, the one- or two-day holiday at each new moon, the yearly cycle of holy day pilgrimages to Jerusalem, the sabbatical year, (one year in seven in

which no agricultural labour was undertaken) and the Jubilee (every 50 years, in which all real property reverted to its original owners) combined to provide extensive leisure without a leisure class, leisure being distributed across the society or at least across all the men of the society.

The other important factor is *technology*. For any given social structure or pattern of organization, the technology determines the surplus. The more useful the knowledge, the larger the surplus. Knowledge ('human capital') is productive when it is embodied in individuals. Human capital may be reserved (in the sense that individuals or members of particular social groups, can be prevented from acquiring it) but if it is to be used it must be possessed by someone. Other things being equal, the more knowledge a society wishes to deploy in its productive activities, the more people must be knowledgeable, and the larger is 'the knowledge class'.

Of course, in such matters, other things never are equal, and the variation in the distribution of knowledge (for consumption as well as for production) is the main source of the difference between the three sorts of service society with which I conclude this article. But holding these variations on one side for a moment, let us first consider what is common across all societies in the course of development. We can certainly say that the process of economic development is dependent on the growth in the total quantity of knowledge, and hence the growth in the size of those classes of people who use special knowledge in production.

This growth leads inevitably to changes in the distribution of leisure. On the one hand fewer people are willing to engage in low value-added face-to-face servant-type production. Those who develop their own skill will wish to extract a 'rent' for it and will be able to do so. And, indeed, in modern societies the new production that results from technological advance is often precisely of goods that can be used to substitute for servants. Thus, 'self-servicing'—those who previously consumed menial services produced by others, now both produce and consume their own.

Similarly, as the general technological level of the society rises, there emerge requirements for very high levels of skill or productive competence, whose possessors can extract a 'rent' that rivals or exceeds that of the possessors of material capital or the inheritors of the feudal class. And as productive organizations become more complex, hierarchies become steeper, positions towards the top of organizational hierarchies increasingly become sources of honour. So a growing proportion of the richest and most honoured members of the society have paid work in productive institutions; and the specifically idle rich are a diminishing minority in industrializing societies.

We can put this concretely in the form of a proposition about change in time allocation. Previously, we might say, some members of the labour class (mostly single women) produced low-value services for consumption by the leisure class in exchange for low wages, while other members of the labour class (mostly married women) produced services on an unwaged and unmechanized basis, for their own households. Long hours of paid work for labour-class men, long hours of unpaid for labour-class women; short hours (if any) of both sorts of work for the leisure class. But with the later stages of industrialization, class differentiation, at least in terms of the broad aggregates of time use largely and rapidly disappears.

Evidence for this historical change in time use patterns is difficult to find: for the most part, the systematic collection of time use data sample for whole

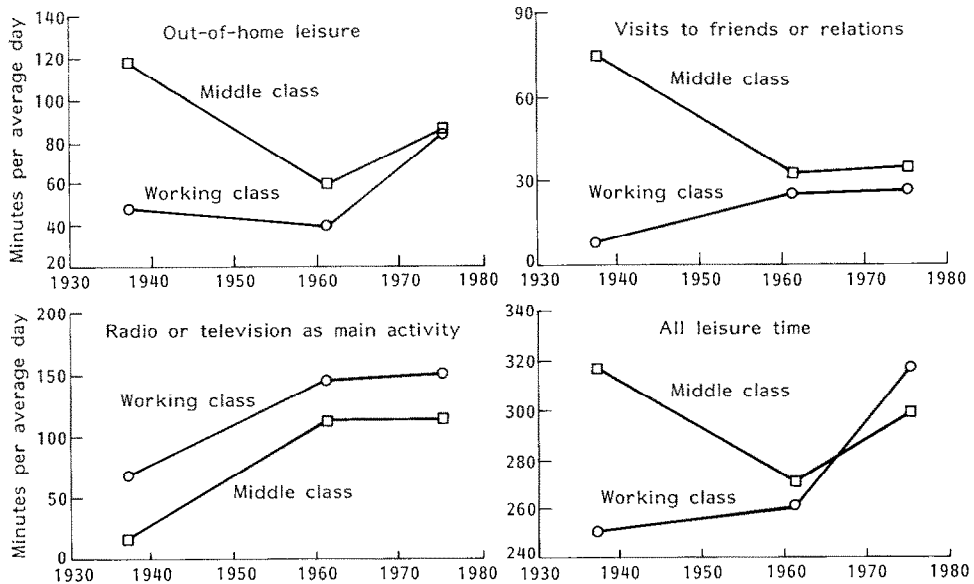


Figure 1. UK men: class convergence.

Sources: 1930 data from Mass Observation Archive; 1961 and 1974/75 data from BBC Audience Research.

populations started in the 1960s, by which time this particular change was virtually complete throughout the industrialized world. But there are some data. I presented evidence, in a recent issue of *Futuribles*,² that the unpaid work of British women in the 1930s, which was sharply differentiated by class because of the presence of domestic servants in middle-class households, had lost all class differences by the 1960s.

From the same source, we can find evidence of the convergence of men's leisure time (Figure 1). We can see that in the 1930s, middle-class men had nearly three times as much out-of-home leisure time (cinema, theatre, sports, public eating and drinking) as working-class men, whereas the class differences disappeared by the mid-1970s. We see a similar class convergence for visiting family or friends in their own houses. Broadcast media, by contrast, figured more largely in working-class than middle-class leisure in the 1930s, but while the absolute class difference remains in 1975, the middle-class men are now much more similar to working-class men in the proportion of their leisure time they devote to these activities. When we add all the categories of leisure together (including other non-sociable leisure at home) we find an overall reversal in the class relationships: working-class men had an hour or so less leisure than middle-class men in the 1930s, and have approaching 20 minutes more than middle-class men in the 1970s. These data are by no means unquestionable. Although the 1970s' evidence comes from a nationally representative sample, the 1930s' estimates are drawn from a non-systematic sample (Mass Observation) recruited through a newspaper advertisement. Nevertheless, they do provide a plausible picture of what we know from anecdotal and employment evidence to have been the case throughout the developed world.

Logic of development

I wish to assert the following as the first of a number of general trends that may be observed in rich economies:

- (1) *the reduction in class differentiation* in and by the broadest aggregate of time use (ie the distribution of work and leisure no longer bear a simple relationship to social stratification).

The foregoing, while probably correct, is not adequately supported by international comparative time use data. We can however do better with evidence for the remaining elements of the argument. There are three further common time use trends within developed societies:

- (2) a general *reduction in time devoted to all sorts of work*; in particular, shorter paid working time for men (although this may not be entirely monotonic through historical time, there are fluctuations related to recessions) and shorter domestic working time for women (in part related to technical change—this is covered by the third proposition).

The evidence for this proposition was discussed in an earlier paper in *Futuribles*.³ The argument is analogous to that in Veblen's account of pre-industrial societies. It is to do with the alternative social mechanisms for dealing with, not 'the surplus' as previously defined (since the notion of subsistence becomes less than useful once it is detached from the brutal facts of starvation and death), but with the modern society's yearly surplus over its previous year's production, which results from the growth in productive efficiency.

This second sort of surplus may be dealt with in a range of different ways. The first, suggested by Staffan Linder in *The Harried Leisure Class*⁴ is that the regular year-on-year increase in productivity in modern societies, is matched by a similar regular increase in the intensity of consumption (I have coined the ugly phrase 'consumptivity growth' to describe this). This, as Linder demonstrates, is costly since consumption (of most though not all commodities) takes time. As we increase the intensity of consumption in a given period of time, it becomes progressively more overcrowded and unleisurely; the result is that we try to consume more and more goods and services within the same finite consumption time. Accordingly, an alternative mechanism for coping with the modern 'surplus' is that the rate of consumption growth is allowed to lag behind that of productivity increase. In this case, consumption remains leisurely, but as potential output exceeds demand, unemployment increases.

And the third potential mechanism for coping with productivity growth is the one that is consistent with the long-term evidence of time allocation for developed societies. As the society's productive potential grows, so the society's time progressively transfers from consumption to production. Productivity growth alongside shorter hours of work, means that employment levels can be maintained and consumption can increase without a corresponding growth of undesirable 'consumptivity'.

This, of course, is an essentially macrosociological argument. There is no direct way that the existence of this equilibrating mechanism for modern economies can influence any individual's choice between work and leisure. But at the individual level, the very phenomena of the overcrowding of consumption described by Linder, are such that those who have regular increases in their purchas-

ing power are, as year follows year, increasingly likely to seek extra free time in which to enjoy their purchases. That is to say, while the equilibrating mechanism of reduction of working hours manifestly fails to guarantee an equilibrium of full employment, nevertheless, in developed societies, working times do regularly decline from decade to decade so as to provide individuals with extra time to consume the extra social product. The societies as a result have extra final demand, which in turn means extra jobs.

The next general proposition concerns

- (3) *gender convergence*—men's and women's aggregate time use balances among leisure and the different sorts of work become increasingly similar over historical time.

This follows essentially the same logic as class convergence. Suppose there is an original position of complete gender segregation, with women largely outside the labour market: as the society becomes increasingly dependent on productive knowledge, and as the return to human capital increases, so increasingly will women wish to exploit their personal capabilities in the labour market rather than in low-value unwaged production within their private households. As for class, so for gender: where marketable skills increase in importance, there will be an increasing unwillingness to specialize in unskilled menial domestic production.

This has implications for men's unpaid work. If the wife has a job, the residual male justification for avoiding housework and other tasks disappears; there are now neither paid domestic servants nor specialized non-employed housewives allowing husbands to specialize exclusively in paid work. There is a certain basic requirement for household tasks. This may be reduced by the introduction of new domestic technologies, and indeed technology must explain a major part of the reduction in women's domestic work that is seen in the time budget data. But some part of the women's reduction in unpaid work does seem to be substituted for by an increase in men's unpaid work. Overall, the result of these two processes is a reduction in the gender differentiation in time use.

The final proposition follows directly from the three foregoing:

- (4) *cross-national convergence*: countries become increasingly similar in their broad pattern of allocation of time among the types of work and leisure.

If a group of societies all show a trend in which all working-age adults have paid jobs, and everyone does some unpaid work, and each society balances leisure time against work so as to compensate for increases in productivity, and if they all have roughly the same level of economic development and all trade with each other, then irrespective of the detailed characteristics of the consumption patterns of the various societies, and however diverse the starting points, their broad patterns of time allocation must converge.

The triangular-shaped graph in Figure 2(a) shows how the total available time (ie the whole day minus sleep, personal care activities and non-social eating) for the eight countries for which we have longitudinal time budget data is divided up between paid work, unpaid work and leisure. (Paid work here includes commuting time; unpaid work includes all those activities which are undertaken without pay but which could in principle be purchased—cooking, housework, odd jobs, child-care and shopping; leisure is the remaining part of the available time). The space enclosed by the triangle represents the set of possible combinations of the three sorts of activity. A society that devoted all its available time to paid work would be

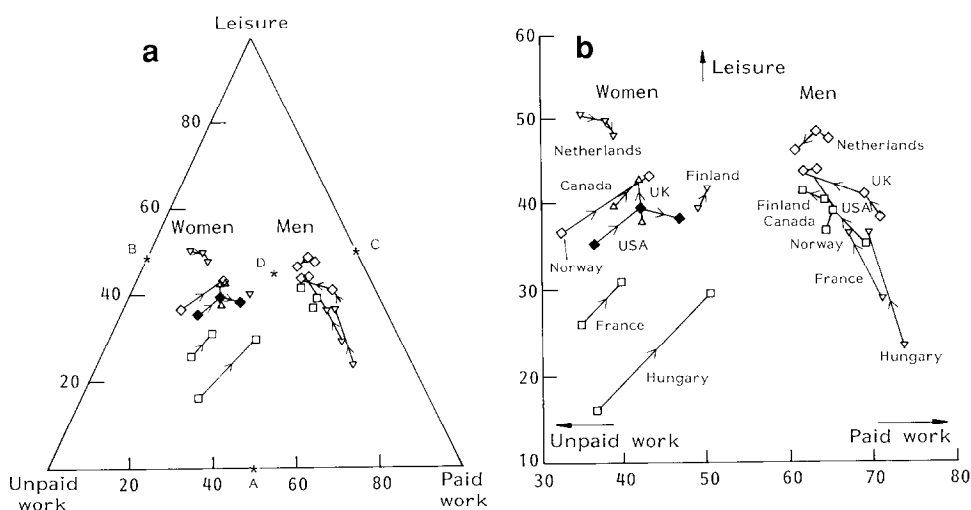


Figure 2. Multinational convergence in time use

located on the right-hand vertex of the triangle. If it split its available time between paid and unpaid work and took no leisure it would be located midway along the base of the triangle (point A). Points B and C represent, respectively, time divided equally between unpaid work and leisure, and between paid work and leisure; we might imagine that, in a society in which the two sorts of work are divided rigidly by gender, B would represent the women's time allocation, C the men's.

Figure 2(b) shows the actual evolution of the work/leisure balance for each of the eight countries, with the arrows indicating the historical sequence. We can see, with the generally upward movements of the lines for each country, the shift from work towards leisure. The men's and women's patterns are clearly segregated, the men specializing disproportionately in paid work, on the right side of the triangle of Figure 2(a), the women, specializing in unpaid, to the left. But if the gender segregation were being maintained as total working time reduced, then the lines would all point directly towards the apex of the triangle. In fact the lines for women point well to the right of the apex, indicating a proportional shift towards paid work, while the men's lines in general point somewhat to the left of the apex, indicating a proportional shift towards unpaid work. In the various countries we see the sexes are converging.

And we see a convergence of the countries, with the women in particular initially having very different patterns (note for instance the contrast between Hungary, where well over half of women had paid jobs at the time of the first survey, and the Netherlands where hardly a quarter of the women were employed). A simple extrapolation of the lines in the triangle graph would bring us, some time towards the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, to a convergence of the countries and sexes, at about point D, giving about 45% of available time to leisure, 25% to unpaid work and 30% to paid work.

Alternative consumption futures

These broad convergences in activity patterns can be expected to persist, for perfectly clear reasons, well into the 21st century. This does not mean, as some

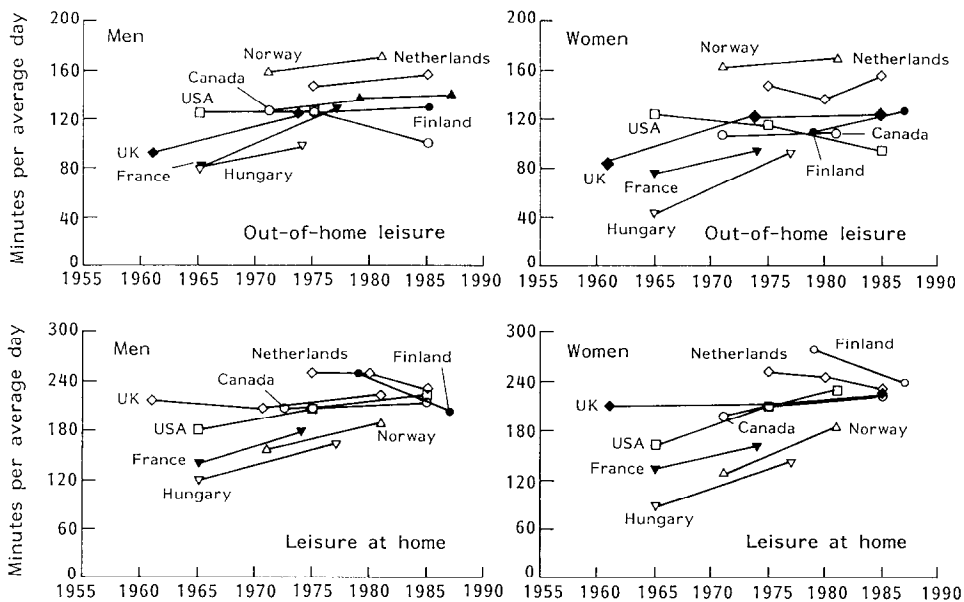


Figure 3. Leisure trends in eight countries

have recently asserted, 'the end of history'. Within these broad lines, there is still scope for societies to diverge in ways that reflect choices among alternative political programmes. Consider for example the cross-national variations in at-home and out-of-home leisure (Figure 3). We see some cross-national convergence in the overall home leisure trends: all the countries seem to be heading towards 200 minutes per day of at-home non-socialable leisure. But there is substantial national difference even within these totals: for example, the UK and the USA spend much more than the average amount of time watching TV, while France spends markedly less. And Figure 3 gives a clear impression of a diversity of trends in out-of-home leisure consumption.

In part this diversity reflects historical and geographical differences, but it also results from differences in public regulatory activity. An important aspect of this is expenditure on material service infrastructure, particularly transport. In North America we can see an interaction between geography and history and public policy, to produce a dispersed urban design which promotes a 'shopping mall' culture of fast food and mass broadcast entertainment, and inhibits the development of more specialized and sophisticated leisure provisions. It reflects not just transport systems; but also patterns of subsidy or provision of cultural facilities, theatre, music, museums, libraries. And it reflects, not just material infrastructure, but also investment in skills: those needed for the *production* of cultural services, cooks, musicians, teachers; also the skills necessary for the *consumption* of these—education for leisure as well as for work.

It is from the international differences in the regulation of service consumption and production that the future divergences in patterns of leisure time use will emerge. Some countries, with governments which do not consider themselves responsible for investment in the material and cultural infrastructure, will tend towards a rather low-value, unspecialized, mass-market consumption, often

located in private homes—TV and McDonalds' cultures. Other countries will invest so as to encourage higher value production and consumption, more specialized and differentiated, which is more often located in public spaces—opera and restaurant cultures. The former requires relatively few skills either in the production or consumption of leisure services; it is relatively polarized, with a technical elite responsible for the design and smooth running of a technically complex mass-consumption service delivery system, and a relatively low skilled mass of low wage service workers. The latter requires a larger group of specialized service workers deploying relatively high value skills in providing for consumers who themselves possess not inconsiderable skills in consumption.

In pre-industrial societies there were the labour and the leisure classes. The labour of one provided the leisure for the other. The gross contrasts in time allocation served to differentiate the classes. And class in turn drove politics. In post-industrial societies, gross time allocation patterns converge, and the *nature* and *quality* of leisure consumption become the basis for social differentiation. Also, the distribution of the different sorts of leisure consumption is, in part at least, determined by political decisions about the regulatory activity of the state. So, while in a pre-industrial society, class determines politics, we might say that in a post-industrial society, it is politics that determines the class structure.

Notes and references

1. Thorstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*.
2. Jonathan Gershuny, 'Allons nous manquer de temps?', *Futuribles*, No 156, July–August 1991.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Staffon Linder, *The Harried Leisure Class* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1970).